

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-12

NEW YORK TIMES
5 MAY 1980

Editors, in Note to Carter, Assail Policy on C.I.A. Use of Reporters

By DEIRDRE CARMODY

The American Society of Newspaper Editors has written a letter to President Carter, expressing concern over his position on the use of American journalists by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The letter, dated April 18 and made public by the society for publication today, referred specifically to remarks made by Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, when he addressed the organization's convention in Washington April 10. Admiral Turner told the editors that he would not hesitate to recruit journalists as agents in given situations if he felt that it was in the national interest to do so. The President said later that he supported the director's position.

Admiral Turner's comments rekindled a controversy that had been thought laid to rest in 1976 when George Bush, then Director of Central Intelligence, announced that the agency would no longer enter into paid relationships with part-time or full-time news correspondents accredited by any American news organizations.

The following year the intelligence agency, under Admiral Turner, restated the prohibition on the use of journalists, but added that exceptions could be made with the specific approval of the director. This proviso went unnoticed by many observers in the press, who thought that the ban on using journalists as agents was still in effect.

Credibility of Journalists

The letter to the President was signed by Thomas Winship, editor of The Boston Globe and president of the national editors' group, and Charles W. Bailey, president of the group's Freedom of Information Committee and editor of The Minneapolis Tribune. It said:

"At issue in this matter, we believe, is not merely the ability of American journalists to operate effectively, but the credibility of the American press at home

and abroad — and in some cases the physical safety of correspondents.

"We believe the Administration simply does not understand why we are so concerned about this: If our concern were fully understood, we believe, the policy would surely be different. We would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this matter with you personally."

For many editors, one of the most troublesome aspects of Admiral Turner's remarks to the society was his evident misunderstanding of how the press felt on the issue. At one point, he called the editors "naïve" and suggested that journalists should consider it an honor to be asked to serve their country. He said he thought most journalists would be "patriotic enough to do this."

Protests in Editorials

A number of editorials on the subject have appeared in newspapers around the country. The Wichita, Kansas, Eagle, in an editorial titled "Memo to Stansfield Turner," said: "One thing that sets the American press apart from many of its counterparts elsewhere is that it is free, not only from government control, as prescribed by the Constitution, but also from government influence. The latter is even more sinister than the former, and it is because the press in so many nations does work closely with the government in power that American news people are so often suspect when they go abroad.

"You correctly said that it would be 'naïve' to think foreign governments regard United States journalists as being above reproach. But that hardly means you should confirm those governments' worst fears by revealing that the C.I.A. does indeed ask journalists to spy for it on occasion."

A spokesman for the White House acknowledged receipt by the President of the society's letter, but said it had not yet responded to it.